

---

---

# WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY?

## *1. The Problem of Political Philosophy*

It is a great honor, and at the same time a challenge to accept a task of particular difficulty, to be asked to speak about political philosophy in Jerusalem. In this city, and in this land, the theme of political philosophy—"the city of righteousness, the faithful city"—has been taken more seriously than anywhere else on earth. Nowhere else has the longing for justice and the just city filled the purest hearts and the loftiest souls with such zeal as on this sacred soil. I know all too well that I am utterly unable to convey to you what in the best possible case, in the case of any man, would be no more than a faint reproduction or a weak imitation of our prophets' vision. I shall even be compelled to lead you into a region where the dimmest recollection of that vision is on the point of vanishing altogether—where the Kingdom of God is derisively called an imagined principality—to say here nothing of the region which was never



illuminated by it. But while being compelled, or compelling myself, to wander far away from our sacred heritage, or to be silent about it, I shall not for a moment forget what Jerusalem stands for.

The meaning of political philosophy and its meaningful character is as evident today as it always has been since the time when political philosophy came to light in Athens. All political action aims at either preservation or change. When desiring to preserve, we wish to prevent a change to the worse; when desiring to change, we wish to bring about something better. All political action is then guided by some thought of better and worse. But thought of better or worse implies thought of the good. The awareness of the good which guides all our actions has the character of opinion: it is no longer questioned but, on reflection, it proves to be questionable. The very fact that we can question it directs us towards such a thought of the good as is no longer questionable—towards a thought which is no longer opinion but knowledge. All political action has then in itself a directedness towards knowledge of the good: of the good life, or of the good society. For the good society is the complete political good.

If this directedness becomes explicit, if men make it their explicit goal to acquire knowledge of the good life and of the good society, political philosophy emerges. By calling this pursuit political philosophy, we imply that it forms a part of a larger whole: of philosophy; or that political philosophy is a branch of philosophy. In the expression "political philosophy," "philosophy" indicates the manner of treatment: a treatment which both goes to the roots and is comprehensive; "political" indicates both the subject matter and the function: political philosophy deals with political matters in a manner that is meant to be relevant for political life; therefore its subject must be identical with the goal, the ultimate goal of political action. The theme of political philosophy is mankind's great objectives, freedom and government or empire—objectives which are capable of lifting all men beyond their poor selves. Political philosophy is that branch of philosophy which is closest to political life, to non-philosophic life, to human life. Only in his *Politics* does Aristotle make use of oaths—the almost inevitable accompaniment of passionate speech.

Since political philosophy is a branch of philosophy, even the most provisional explanation of what political philosophy is cannot



dispense with an explanation, however provisional, of what philosophy is. Philosophy, as quest for wisdom, is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole. The quest would not be necessary if such knowledge were immediately available. The absence of knowledge of the whole does not mean, however, that men do not have thoughts about the whole: philosophy is necessarily preceded by opinions about the whole. It is, therefore, the attempt to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of the whole. Instead of "the whole" the philosophers also say "all things": the whole is not a pure ether or an unrelieved darkness in which one cannot distinguish one part from the other, or in which one cannot discern anything. Quest for knowledge of "all things" means quest for knowledge of God, the world, and man—or rather quest for knowledge of the natures of all things: the natures in their totality are "the whole."

Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but quest for the truth. The distinctive trait of the philosopher is that "he knows that he knows nothing," and that his insight into our ignorance concerning the most important things induces him to strive with all his power for knowledge. He would cease to be a philosopher by evading the questions concerning these things or by disregarding them because they cannot be answered. It may be that as regards the possible answers to these questions, the pros and cons will always be in a more or less even balance, and therefore that philosophy will never go beyond the stage of discussion or disputation and will never reach the stage of decision. This would not make philosophy futile. For the clear grasp of a fundamental question requires understanding of the nature of the subject matter with which the question is concerned. Genuine knowledge of a fundamental question, thorough understanding of it, is better than blindness to it, or indifference to it, be that indifference or blindness accompanied by knowledge of the answers to a vast number of peripheral or ephemeral questions or not. *Minimum quod potest haberi de cognitione rerum altissimarum, desiderabilius est quam certissima cognitio quae habetur de minimis rebus.* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 12.5)

Of philosophy thus understood, political philosophy is a branch. Political philosophy will then be the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of



political things. Political things are by their nature subject to approval and disapproval, to choice and rejection, to praise and blame. It is of their essence not to be neutral but to raise a claim to men's obedience, allegiance, decision or judgment. One does not understand them as what they are, as political things, if one does not take seriously their explicit or implicit claim to be judged in terms of goodness or badness, of justice or injustice, i.e., if one does not measure them by some standard of goodness or justice. To judge soundly one must know the true standards. If political philosophy wishes to do justice to its subject matter, it must strive for genuine knowledge of these standards. Political philosophy is the attempt truly to know both the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order.

Political philosophy ought to be distinguished from political thought in general. In our times, they are frequently identified. People have gone so far in debasing the name of philosophy as to speak of the philosophies of vulgar impostors. By political thought we understand the reflection on, or the exposition of, political ideas; and by a political idea we may understand any politically significant "phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is about which the mind can be employed in thinking" concerning the political fundamentals. Hence, all political philosophy is political thought but not all political thought is political philosophy. Political thought is, as such, indifferent to the distinction between opinion and knowledge; but political philosophy is the conscious, coherent and relentless effort to replace opinions about the political fundamentals by knowledge regarding them. Political thought may not be more, and may not even intend to be more, than the expounding or the defense of a firmly held conviction or of an invigorating myth; but it is essential to political philosophy to be set in motion, and be kept in motion, by the disquieting awareness of the fundamental difference between conviction, or belief, and knowledge. A political thinker who is not a philosopher is primarily interested in, or attached to, a specific order or policy; the political philosopher is primarily interested in, or attached to, the truth. Political thought which is not political philosophy finds its adequate expression in laws and codes, in poems and stories, in tracts and public speeches *inter alia*; the proper form of presenting political philosophy is the treatise. Political thought is as old as the human race; the first man who uttered a word like



“father” or an expression like “thou shalt not . . .” was the first political thinker; but political philosophy appeared at a knowable time in the recorded past.

By political theory, people frequently understand today comprehensive reflections on the political situation which lead up to the suggestion of a broad policy. Such reflections appeal in the last resort to principles accepted by public opinion or a considerable part of it; i.e., they dogmatically assume principles which can well be questioned. Works of political theory in this sense would be Pinsker's *Autoemancipation* and Herzl's *Judenstaat*. Pinsker's *Autoemancipation* carries as its motto the words: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if not now, when?” It omits the words: “And if I am only for myself, what am I?” Pinsker's silent rejection of the thought expressed in the omitted words is a crucial premise of the argument developed in his tract. Pinsker does not justify this rejection. For a justification, one would have to turn to the 3rd and 16th chapters of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, to a work of a political philosopher.

We are compelled to distinguish political philosophy from political theology. By political theology we understand political teachings which are based on divine revelation. Political philosophy is limited to what is accessible to the unassisted human mind. As regards social philosophy, it has the same subject matter as political philosophy, but it regards it from a different point of view. Political philosophy rests on the premise that the political association—one's country or one's nation—is the most comprehensive or the most authoritative association, whereas social philosophy conceives of the political association as a part of a larger whole which it designates by the term “society.”

Finally, we must discuss the relation of political philosophy to political science. “Political science” is an ambiguous term: it designates such investigations of political things as are guided by the model of natural science, and it designates the work which is being done by the members of political science departments. As regards the former, or what we may call “scientific” political science, it conceives of itself as *the* way towards genuine knowledge of political things. Just as genuine knowledge of natural things began when people turned from sterile and vain speculation to empirical and experimental study, the genuine knowledge of political things will



begin when political philosophy will have given way completely to the scientific study of politics. Just as natural science stands on its own feet, and at most supplies unintentionally materials for the speculations of natural philosophers, political science stands on its own feet, and at most supplies unintentionally materials for the speculations of political philosophers. Considering the contrast between the solidity of the one pursuit and the pitiful pretentiousness characteristic of the other, it is however more reasonable to dismiss the vague and inane speculations of political philosophy altogether than to go on paying lip service to a wholly discredited and decrepit tradition. The sciences, both natural and political, are frankly non-philosophic. They need philosophy of a kind: methodology or logic. But these philosophic disciplines have obviously nothing in common with political philosophy. "Scientific" political science is in fact incompatible with political philosophy.

The useful work done by the men called political scientists is independent of any aspiration towards "scientific" political science. It consists of careful and judicious collections and analyses of politically relevant data. To understand the meaning of this work, we remind ourselves of our provisional definition of political philosophy. Political philosophy is the attempt to understand the nature of political things. Before one can even think of attempting to understand the nature of political things, one must know political things: one must possess political knowledge. At least every sane adult possesses political knowledge to some degree. Everyone knows something of taxes, police, law, jails, war, peace, armistice. Everyone knows that the aim of war is victory, that war demands the supreme sacrifice and many other deprivations, that bravery deserves praise and cowardice deserves blame. Everyone knows that buying a shirt, as distinguished from casting a vote, is not in itself a political action. The man in the street is supposed to possess less political knowledge than the men who make it their business to supply him with information and guidance regarding political things. He certainly possesses less political knowledge than very intelligent men of long and varied political experience. At the top of the ladder we find the great statesman who possesses political knowledge, political understanding, political wisdom, political skill in the highest degree: political science (*politikē epistēmē*) in the original meaning of the term.



All political knowledge is surrounded by political opinion and interspersed with it. By political opinion we understand here opinion as distinguished from knowledge of political things: errors, guesses, beliefs, prejudices, forecasts, and so on. It is of the essence of political life to be guided by a mixture of political knowledge and political opinion. Hence, all political life is accompanied by more or less coherent and more or less strenuous efforts to replace political opinion by political knowledge. Even governments which lay claim to more than human knowledge are known to employ spies.

The character of political knowledge and of the demands made on it has been profoundly affected by a fairly recent change in the character of society. In former epochs, intelligent men could acquire the political knowledge, the political understanding they needed, by listening to wise old men or, which is the same thing, by reading good historians, as well as by looking around and by devoting themselves to public affairs. These ways of acquiring political knowledge are no longer sufficient because we live in "dynamic mass societies," i.e., in societies which are characterized by both immense complexity and rapid change. Political knowledge is more difficult to come by and it becomes obsolete more rapidly than in former times. Under these conditions it becomes necessary that a number of men should devote themselves entirely to the task of collecting and digesting knowledge of political things. It is this activity which today is frequently called political science. It does not emerge if it has not been realized among other things that even such political matters as have no bearing on the situation of the day deserve to be studied, and that their study must be carried on with the greatest possible care: a specific care which is designed to counteract the specific fallacies to which our judgment on political things is exposed. Furthermore, the men we speak of invest much toil in giving political knowledge the form of teachings which can be transmitted in classrooms. Moreover, while even the most unscrupulous politician must constantly try to replace in his own mind political opinion by political knowledge in order to be successful, the scholarly student of political things will go beyond this by trying to state the results of his investigations in public without any concealment and without any partisanship: he will act the part of the enlightened and patriotic citizen who



has no axe of his own to grind. Or, differently expressed, the scholarly quest for political knowledge is essentially animated by a moral impulse, the love of truth. But however one may conceive of the difference between the scholarly and the non-scholarly quest for political knowledge, and however important these differences may be, the scholarly and the non-scholarly quest for political knowledge are identical in the decisive respect: their center of reference is the given political situation, and even in most cases the given political situation in the individual's own country. It is true that a botanist in Israel pays special attention to the flora of Israel, whereas the botanist in Canada pays special attention to the flora of Canada. But this difference, which is not more than the outcome of a convenient and even indispensable division of labor, has an entirely different character than the only apparently similar difference between the preoccupation of the Israeli political scientist and the Canadian political scientist. It is only when the Here and Now ceases to be the center of reference that a philosophic or scientific approach to politics can emerge.

All knowledge of political things implies assumptions concerning the nature of political things; i.e., assumptions which concern not merely the given political situation, but political life or human life as such. One cannot know anything about a war going on at a given time without having some notion, however dim and hazy, of war as such and its place within human life as such. One cannot see a policeman as a policeman without having made an assumption about law and government as such. The assumptions concerning the nature of political things, which are implied in all knowledge of political things, have the character of opinions. It is only when these assumptions are made the theme of critical and coherent analysis that a philosophic or scientific approach to politics emerges.

The cognitive status of political knowledge is not different from that of the knowledge possessed by the shepherd, the husband, the general, or the cook. Yet the pursuits of these types of man do not give rise to a pastoral, marital, military, or culinary philosophy because their ultimate goals are sufficiently clear and unambiguous. The ultimate political goal, on the other hand, urgently calls for coherent reflection. The goal of the general is victory, whereas the goal of the statesman is the common good. What victory means is not essentially controversial, but the meaning of the common good



is essentially controversial. The ambiguity of the political goal is due to its comprehensive character. Thus the temptation arises to deny, or to evade, the comprehensive character of politics and to treat politics as one compartment among many. But this temptation must be resisted if it is necessary to face our situation as human beings, i.e., the whole situation.

Political philosophy as we have tried to circumscribe it has been cultivated since its beginnings almost without any interruption until a relatively short time ago. Today, political philosophy is in a state of decay and perhaps of putrefaction, if it has not vanished altogether. Not only is there complete disagreement regarding its subject matter, its methods, and its function; its very possibility in any form has become questionable. The only point regarding which academic teachers of political science still agree, concerns the usefulness of studying the history of political philosophy. As regards the philosophers, it is sufficient to contrast the work of the four greatest philosophers of the last forty years—Bergson, Whitehead, Husserl, and Heidegger—with the work of Hermann Cohen in order to see how rapidly and thoroughly political philosophy has become discredited. We may describe the present situation as follows. Originally political philosophy was identical with political science, and it was the all-embracing study of human affairs. Today, we find it cut into pieces which behave as if they were parts of a worm. In the first place, one has applied the distinction between philosophy and science to the study of human affairs, and accordingly one makes a distinction between a non-philosophic political science and a non-scientific political philosophy, a distinction which under present conditions takes away all dignity, all honesty from political philosophy. Furthermore, large segments of what formerly belonged to political philosophy or political science have become emancipated under the names of economics, sociology, and social psychology. The pitiable rump for which honest social scientists do not care is left as prey to philosophers of history and to people who amuse themselves more than others with professions of faith. We hardly exaggerate when we say that today political philosophy does not exist any more, except as matter for burial, i.e., for historical research, or else as a theme of weak and unconvincing protestations.

If we inquire into the reasons for this great change, we receive



these answers: political philosophy is unscientific, or it is unhistorical, or it is both. Science and History, those two great powers of the modern world, have finally succeeded in destroying the very possibility of political philosophy.

The rejection of political philosophy as unscientific is characteristic of present-day positivism. Positivism is no longer what it desired to be when Auguste Comte originated it. It still agrees with Comte by maintaining that modern science is the highest form of knowledge, precisely because it aims no longer, as theology and metaphysics did, at absolute knowledge of the Why, but only at relative knowledge of the How. But after having been modified by utilitarianism, evolutionism, and neo-Kantianism, it has abandoned completely Comte's hope that a social science modeled on modern natural science would be able to overcome the intellectual anarchy of modern society. In about the last decade of the 19th century, social science positivism reached its final form by realizing or decreeing that there is a fundamental difference between facts and values, and that only factual judgments are within the competence of science: scientific social science is incompetent to pronounce value judgments, and must avoid value judgments altogether. As for the meaning of the term "value" in statements of this kind, we can hardly say more than that "values" mean both things preferred and principles of preference.

A discussion of the tenets of social science positivism is today indispensable for explaining the meaning of political philosophy. We reconsider especially the practical consequences of this positivism. Positivistic social science is "value-free" or "ethically neutral": it is neutral in the conflict between good and evil, however good and evil may be understood. This means that the ground which is common to all social scientists, the ground on which they carry on their investigations and discussions, can only be reached through a process of emancipation from moral judgments, or of abstracting from moral judgments: moral obtuseness is the necessary condition for scientific analysis. For to the extent to which we are not yet completely insensitive to moral distinctions, we are forced to make value judgments. The habit of looking at social or human phenomena without making value judgments has a corroding influence on any preferences. The more serious we are as social scientists, the more completely we develop within ourselves a state



of indifference to any goal, or of aimlessness and drifting, a state which may be called nihilism. The social scientist is not immune to preferences; his activity is a constant fight against the preferences he has as a human being and a citizen and which threaten to overcome his scientific detachment. He derives the power to counteract these dangerous influences by his dedication to one and only one value—to truth. But according to his principles, truth is not a value which it is necessary to choose: one may reject it as well as choose it. The scientist as scientist must indeed have chosen it. But neither scientists nor science are simply necessary. Social science cannot pronounce on the question of whether social science itself is good. It is then compelled to teach that society can with equal right and with equal reason favor social science as well as suppress it as disturbing, subversive, corrosive, nihilistic. But strangely enough we find social scientists very anxious to “sell” social science, i.e., to prove that social science is necessary. They will argue as follows. Regardless of what our preferences or ends may be, we wish to achieve our ends; to achieve our ends, we must know which means are conducive to our ends; but adequate knowledge of the means conducive to any social ends is the sole function of social science and only of social science; hence social science is necessary for any society or any social movement; social science is then simply necessary; it is a value from every point of view. But once we grant this we are seriously tempted to wonder if there are not a few other things which must be values from every point of view or for every thinking human being. To avoid this inconvenience the social scientist will scorn all considerations of public relations or of private advancement, and take refuge in the virtuous contention that he does not know, but merely believes that quest for truth is good: other men may believe with equal right that quest for truth is bad. But what does he mean by this contention? Either he makes a distinction between noble and ignoble objectives or he refuses to make such a distinction. If he makes a distinction between noble and ignoble objectives he will say there is a variety of noble objectives or of ideals, and that there is no ideal which is compatible with all other ideals: if one chooses truth as one’s ideal, one necessarily rejects other ideals; this being the case, there cannot be a necessity, an evident necessity for noble men to choose truth in preference to other ideals. But as long as the social scientist speaks



of ideals, and thus makes a distinction between noble and not noble objectives, or between idealistic integrity and petty egoism, he makes a value judgment which according to his fundamental contention is, as such, no longer necessary. He must then say that it is as legitimate to make the pursuit of safety, income, deference one's sole aim in life as it is to make the quest for truth one's chief aim. He thus lays himself open to the suspicion that his activity as a social scientist serves no other purpose than to increase his safety, his income, and his prestige, or that his competence as a social scientist is a skill which he is prepared to sell to the highest bidder. Honest citizens will begin to wonder whether such a man can be trusted, or whether he can be loyal, especially since he must maintain that it is as defensible to choose loyalty as one's value as it is to reject it. In a word, he will get entangled in the predicament which leads to the downfall of Thrasymachus and his taming by Socrates in the first book of Plato's *Republic*.

It goes without saying that while our social scientist may be confused, he is very far from being disloyal and from lacking integrity. His assertion that integrity and quest for truth are values which one can with equal right choose or reject is a mere movement of his lips and his tongue, to which nothing corresponds in his heart or mind. I have never met any scientific social scientist who apart from being dedicated to truth and integrity was not also wholeheartedly devoted to democracy. When he says that democracy is a value which is not evidently superior to the opposite value, he does not mean that he is impressed by the alternative which he rejects, or that his heart or his mind is torn between alternatives which in themselves are equally attractive. His "ethical neutrality" is so far from being nihilism or a road to nihilism that it is not more than an alibi for thoughtlessness and vulgarity: by saying that democracy and truth are values, he says in effect that one does not have to think about the reasons why these things are good, and that he may bow as well as anyone else to the values that are adopted and respected by his society. Social science positivism fosters not so much nihilism as conformism and philistinism.

It is not necessary to enter here and now into a discussion of the theoretical weaknesses of social science positivism. It suffices to allude to the considerations which speak decisively against this



school. (1) It is impossible to study social phenomena, i.e., all important social phenomena, without making value judgments. A man who sees no reason for not despising people whose horizon is limited to their consumption of food and their digestion may be a tolerable econometrist; he cannot say anything relevant about the character of a human society. A man who refuses to distinguish between great statesmen, mediocrities, and insane impostors may be a good bibliographer; he cannot say anything relevant about politics and political history. A man who cannot distinguish between a profound religious thought and a languishing superstition may be a good statistician; he cannot say anything relevant about the sociology of religion. Generally speaking, it is impossible to understand thought or action or work without evaluating it. If we are unable to evaluate adequately, as we very frequently are, we have not yet succeeded in understanding adequately. The value judgments which are forbidden to enter through the front door of political science, sociology or economics, enter these disciplines through the back door; they come from that annex of present-day social science which is called psychopathology. Social scientists see themselves compelled to speak of unbalanced, neurotic, maladjusted people. But these value judgments are distinguished from those used by the great historians, not by greater clarity or certainty, but merely by their poverty: a slick operator is as well adjusted as, he may be better adjusted than, a good man or a good citizen. Finally, we must not overlook the invisible value judgments which are concealed from undiscerning eyes but nevertheless most powerfully present in allegedly purely descriptive concepts. For example, when social scientists distinguish between democratic and authoritarian habits or types of human beings, what they call "authoritarian" is in all cases known to me a caricature of everything of which they, as good democrats of a certain kind, disapprove. Or when they speak of three principles of legitimacy, rational, traditional, and charismatic, their very expression "routinization of charisma" betrays a Protestant or liberal preference which no conservative Jew and no Catholic would accept: in the light of the notion of "routinization of charisma," the genesis of the Halakah out of Biblical prophesy on the one hand, and the genesis of the Catholic Church out of the New Testament teaching, necessarily appear as cases of "routinization of charisma." If the objection should be made that value



judgments are indeed inevitable in social science but have a merely conditional character, I would reply as follows: are the conditions in question not necessarily fulfilled when we are interested in social phenomena? must the social scientist not necessarily make the assumption that a healthy social life in this world is good, just as medicine necessarily makes the assumption that health and a healthy long life are good? And also are not all factual assertions based on conditions, or assumptions, which however do not become questionable as long as we deal with facts qua facts (e.g., that there are "facts," that events have causes)?

The impossibility of a "value-free" political science can be shown most simply as follows. Political science presupposes a distinction between political things and things which are not political; it presupposes therefore some answer to the question "what is political?" In order to be truly scientific, political science would have to raise this question and to answer it explicitly and adequately. But it is impossible to define the political, i.e., that which is related in a relevant way to the *polis*, the "country" or the "state," without answering the question of what constitutes this kind of society. Now, a society cannot be defined without reference to its purpose. The most well known attempt to define "the state" without regard to its purpose admittedly led to a definition which was derived from "the modern type of state" and which is fully applicable only to that type; it was an attempt to define the modern state without having first defined the state. But by defining the state, or rather civil society, with reference to its purpose, one admits a standard in the light of which one must judge political actions and institutions: the purpose of civil society necessarily functions as a standard for judging of civil societies.

(2) The rejection of value judgments is based on the assumption that the conflicts between different values or value-systems are essentially insoluble for human reason. But this assumption, while generally taken to be sufficiently established, has never been proven. Its proof would require an effort of the magnitude of that which went into the conception and elaboration of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; it would require a comprehensive critique of evaluating reason. What we find in fact are sketchy observations which pretend to prove that this or that specific value conflict is insoluble. It is prudent to grant that there are value conflicts which cannot



in fact be settled by human reason. But if we cannot decide which of two mountains whose peaks are hidden by clouds is higher than the other, cannot we decide that a mountain is higher than a mole-hill? If we cannot decide, regarding a war between two neighboring nations which have been fighting each other for centuries, which nation's cause is more just, cannot we decide that Jezebel's action against Naboth was inexcusable? The greatest representative of social science positivism, Max Weber, has postulated the insolubility of all value conflicts, because his soul craved a universe in which failure, that bastard of forceful sinning accompanied by still more forceful faith, instead of felicity and serenity, was to be the mark of human nobility. The belief that value judgments are not subject, in the last analysis, to rational control, encourages the inclination to make irresponsible assertions regarding right and wrong or good and bad. One evades serious discussion of serious issues by the simple device of passing them off as value problems. One even creates the impression that all important human conflicts are value conflicts, whereas, to say the least, many of these conflicts arise out of men's very agreement regarding values.

(3) The belief that scientific knowledge, i.e., the kind of knowledge possessed or aspired to by modern science, is the highest form of human knowledge, implies a depreciation of pre-scientific knowledge. If one takes into consideration the contrast between scientific knowledge of the world and pre-scientific knowledge of the world, one realizes that positivism preserves in a scarcely disguised manner Descartes' universal doubt of pre-scientific knowledge and his radical break with it. It certainly distrusts pre-scientific knowledge, which it likes to compare to folklore. This superstition fosters all sorts of sterile investigations or complicated idiocies. Things which every ten-year-old child of normal intelligence knows are regarded as being in need of scientific proof in order to become acceptable as facts. And this scientific proof, which is not only not necessary, is not even possible. To illustrate this by the simplest example: all studies in social science presuppose that its devotees can tell human beings from other beings; this most fundamental knowledge was not acquired by them in classrooms; and this knowledge is not transformed by social science into scientific knowledge, but retains its initial status without any modification throughout. If this pre-scientific knowledge is not knowledge, all



scientific studies, which stand or fall with it, lack the character of knowledge. The preoccupation with scientific proof of things which everyone knows well enough, and better, without scientific proof, leads to the neglect of that thinking, or that reflection, which must precede all scientific studies if these studies are to be relevant. The scientific study of politics is often presented as ascending from the ascertainment of political "facts," i.e., of what has happened hitherto in politics, to the formulation of "laws" whose knowledge would permit the prediction of future political events. This goal is taken as a matter of course without a previous investigation as to whether the subject matter with which political science deals admits of adequate understanding in terms of "laws" or whether the universals through which political things can be understood as what they are must not be conceived of in entirely different terms. Scientific concern with political facts, relations of political facts, recurrent relations of political facts, or laws of political behavior, requires isolation of the phenomena which it is studying. But if this isolation is not to lead to irrelevant or misleading results, one must see the phenomena in question within the whole to which they belong, and one must clarify that whole, i.e., the whole political or politico-social order. One cannot arrive, e.g., at a kind of knowledge of "group politics" which deserves to be called scientific if one does not reflect on what genus of political orders is presupposed if there is to be "group politics" at all, and what kind of political order is presupposed by the specific "group politics" which one is studying. But one cannot clarify the character of a specific democracy, e.g., or of democracy in general, without having a clear understanding of the alternatives to democracy. Scientific political scientists are inclined to leave it at the distinction between democracy and authoritarianism, i.e., they absolutize the given political order by remaining within a horizon which is defined by the given political order and its opposite. The scientific approach tends to lead to the neglect of the primary or fundamental questions and therewith to thoughtless acceptance of received opinion. As regards these fundamental questions our friends of scientific exactness are strangely unexact. To refer again to the most simple and at the same time decisive example, political science requires clarification of what distinguishes political things from things which are not political; it requires that the question be



raised and answered "what is political?" This question cannot be dealt with scientifically but only dialectically. And dialectical treatment necessarily begins from pre-scientific knowledge and takes it most seriously. Pre-scientific knowledge, or "common sense" knowledge, is thought to be discredited by Copernicus and the succeeding natural science. But the fact that what we may call telescopic-microscopic knowledge is very fruitful in certain areas does not entitle one to deny that there are things which can only be seen as what they are if they are seen with the unarmed eye; or, more precisely, if they are seen in the perspective of the citizen, as distinguished from the perspective of the scientific observer. If one denies this, one will repeat the experience of Gulliver with the nurse in Brobdingnag and become entangled in the kind of research projects by which he was amazed in Laputa.

(4) Positivism necessarily transforms itself into historicism. By virtue of its orientation by the model of natural science, social science is in danger of mistaking peculiarities of, say, mid-twentieth century United States, or more generally of modern western society, for the essential character of human society. To avoid this danger, it is compelled to engage in "cross-cultural research," in the study of other cultures, both present and past. But in making this effort, it misses the meaning of those other cultures, because it interprets them through a conceptual scheme which originates in modern western society, which reflects that particular society, and which fits at best only that particular society. To avoid this danger, social science must attempt to understand those cultures as they understand or understood themselves: the understanding primarily required of the social scientist is historical understanding. Historical understanding becomes the basis of a truly empirical science of society. But if one considers the infinity of the task of historical understanding, one begins to wonder whether historical understanding does not take the place of the scientific study of society. Furthermore, social science is said to be a body of true propositions about social phenomena. The propositions are answers to questions. What valid answers, objectively valid answers, are, may be determined by the rules or principles of logic. But the questions depend on one's direction of interest, and hence on one's values, i.e., on subjective principles. Now it is the direction of interests, and not logic, which supplies the fundamental concepts.



It is therefore not possible to divorce from each other the subjective and objective elements of social science: the objective answers receive their meaning from the subjective questions. If one does not relapse into the decayed Platonism which is underlying the notion of timeless values, one must conceive of the values embodied in a given social science as dependent on the society to which the social science in question belongs, i.e., on history. Not only is social science superseded by historical studies; social science itself proves to be "historical." Reflection on social science as a historical phenomenon leads to the relativization of social science and ultimately of modern science generally. As a consequence, modern science comes to be viewed as one historically relative way of understanding things which is not in principle superior to alternative ways of understanding.

It is only at this point that we come face to face with the serious antagonist of political philosophy: historicism. After having reached its full growth historicism is distinguished from positivism by the following characteristics. (1) It abandons the distinction between facts and values, because every understanding, however theoretical, implies specific evaluations. (2) It denies the authoritative character of modern science, which appears as only one form among many of man's thinking orientation in the world. (3) It refuses to regard the historical process as fundamentally progressive, or, more generally stated, as reasonable. (4) It denies the relevance of the evolutionist thesis by contending that the evolution of man out of non-man cannot make intelligible man's humanity. Historicism rejects the question of the good society, that is to say, of *the* good society, because of the essentially historical character of society and of human thought: there is no essential necessity for raising the question of the good society; this question is not in principle coeval with man; its very possibility is the outcome of a mysterious dispensation of fate. The crucial issue concerns the status of those permanent characteristics of humanity, such as the distinction between the noble and the base, which are admitted by the thoughtful historicists: can these permanencies be used as criteria for distinguishing between good and bad dispensations of fate? The historicist answers this question in the negative. He looks down on the permanencies in question because of their objective, common, superficial and rudimentary character:



to become relevant, they would have to be completed, and their completion is no longer common but historical. It was the contempt for these permanencies which permitted the most radical historicist in 1933 to submit to, or rather to welcome, as a dispensation of fate, the verdict of the least wise and least moderate part of his nation while it was in its least wise and least moderate mood, and at the same time to speak of wisdom and moderation. The biggest event of 1933 would rather seem to have proved, if such proof was necessary, that man cannot abandon the question of the good society, and that he cannot free himself from the responsibility for answering it by deferring to History or to any other power different from his own reason.

## *II. The Classical Solution*

When we describe the political philosophy of Plato and of Aristotle as classical political philosophy, we imply that it is the classic form of political philosophy. The classic was once said to be characterized by noble simplicity and quiet grandeur. This suggestion guides us in the right direction. It is an attempt to articulate what was formerly also called the "natural" character of classical thought. "Natural" is here understood in contradistinction to what is merely human, all too human. A human being is said to be natural if he is guided by nature rather than by convention, or by inherited opinion, or by tradition, to say nothing of mere whims. Classical political philosophy is non-traditional, because it belongs to the fertile moment when all political traditions were shaken, and there was not yet in existence a tradition of political philosophy. In all later epochs, the philosophers' study of political things was mediated by a tradition of political philosophy which acted like a screen between the philosopher and political things, regardless of whether the individual philosopher cherished or rejected that tradition. From this it follows that the classical philosophers see the political things with a freshness and directness which have never been equalled. They look at political things in the perspective of the enlightened citizen or statesman. They see things clearly which the enlightened citizens or statesmen do not see clearly, or do not see at all. But this has no other reason but the fact



that they look further afield in the same direction as the enlightened citizens or statesmen. They do not look at political things from the outside, as spectators of political life. They speak the language of the citizens or statesmen: they hardly use a single term which is not familiar to the market place. Hence their political philosophy is comprehensive; it is both political theory and political skill; it is as open minded to the legal and institutional aspects of political life as it is to that which transcends the legal and institutional; it is equally free from the narrowness of the lawyer, the brutality of the technician, the vagaries of the visionary, and the baseness of the opportunist. It reproduces, and raises to its perfection, the magnanimous flexibility of the true statesman, who crushes the insolent and spares the vanquished. It is free from all fanaticism because it knows that evil cannot be eradicated and therefore that one's expectations from politics must be moderate. The spirit which animates it may be described as serenity or sublime sobriety.

Compared with classical political philosophy, all later political thought, whatever else its merits may be, and in particular modern political thought, has a derivative character. This means that in later times there has occurred an estrangement from the simple and primary issues. This has given to political philosophy the character of "abstractness," and has therefore engendered the view that the philosophic movement must be a movement, not from opinion to knowledge, not from the here and now to what is always or eternal, but from the abstract towards the concrete. It was thought that by virtue of this movement towards the concrete, recent philosophy has overcome the limitations not only of modern political philosophy, but of classical political philosophy as well. It was overlooked, however, that this change of orientation perpetuated the original defect of modern philosophy because it accepted abstractions as its starting point, and that the concrete at which one eventually arrived was not at all the truly concrete, but still an abstraction.

One example must suffice here. Today it is held in certain circles that the basic task of political or social science is to understand the most concrete human relation, and that relation is called the I—Thou—We relation. It is obvious that the Thou and the We are supplements to Descartes' Ego; the question is whether the fundamental inadequacy of Descartes' Ego can be disposed of by



any supplements, and whether it is not necessary to return to a more fundamental beginning, or to the natural beginning. The phenomenon which is now called the I—Thou—We relation was known to the classics by the name of friendship. When speaking to a friend I address him in the second person. But philosophic or scientific analysis is not speaking to a friend, i.e., to this individual here and now, but speaking to anyone concerned with such analysis. Such analysis cannot be meant to be a substitute for living together as friends; it can at best only point to such living together or arouse a desire for it. When speaking about someone with whom I have a close relation I call him my friend. I do not call him my Thou. Adequate “speaking about” in analytical or objective speech must be grounded in and continue the manner of “speaking about” which is inherent in human life. By speaking of “the Thou” instead of “the friend,” I am trying to preserve in objective speech what cannot be preserved in objective speech; I am trying to objectify something that is incapable of being objectified. I am trying to preserve in “speaking about” what can be actual only in “speaking to.” Hence I do injustice to the phenomena; I am untrue to the phenomena; I miss the concrete. While attempting to lay a foundation for genuine human communication, I preserve an incapacity for genuine human communication.

The character of classical political philosophy appears with the greatest clarity from Plato’s *Laws*, which is his political work *par excellence*. The *Laws* is a conversation about law, and political things in general, between an old Athenian stranger, an old Cretan, and an old Spartan. The conversation takes place on the island of Crete. At the beginning one receives the impression that the Athenian has come to Crete in order to study there the best laws. For if it is true that the good is identical with the ancestral, the best laws for a Greek would be the oldest Greek laws, and these are the Cretan laws. But the equation of the good with the ancestral is not tenable if the first ancestors were not gods, or sons of gods, or pupils of gods. Hence, the Cretans believed that their laws were originated by Zeus, who instructed his son Minos, the Cretan legislator. The *Laws* opens with an expression of this belief. It appears immediately afterwards that this belief has no other ground, no better ground, than a saying of Homer—and the poets are of questionable veracity—as well as what the Cretans say—and the



Cretans were famous for their lack of veracity. However this may be, very shortly after its beginning, the conversation shifts from the question of the origins of the Cretan laws and the Spartan laws to the question of their intrinsic worth: a code given by a god, by a being of superhuman excellence, must be unqualifiedly good. Very slowly, very circumspectly does the Athenian approach this grave question. To begin with he limits his criticism of the principle underlying the Cretan and the Spartan codes by criticizing not these codes, but a poet, a man without authority and, in addition, an expatriate, who had praised the same principle. In the sequel, the philosopher attacks not yet the Cretan and the Spartan codes, but the interpretation of these codes which had been set forth by his two interlocutors. He does not begin to criticize these venerable codes explicitly until he has appealed to a presumed Cretan and Spartan law which permits such criticism under certain conditions—under conditions which are fulfilled, to some extent, in the present conversation. According to that law, all must say with one voice and with one mouth that all the laws of Crete, or of Sparta, are good because they are god-given, and no one is suffered to say something different; but an old citizen may utter a criticism of an allegedly divine law before a magistrate of his own age if no young men are present. By this time it has become clear to the reader that the Athenian has not come to Crete in order to study there the best laws, but rather in order to introduce into Crete new laws and institutions, truly good laws and institutions. These laws and institutions will prove to be, to a considerable extent, of Athenian origin. It seems that the Athenian, being the son of a highly civilized society, has embarked on the venture of civilizing a rather uncivilized society. Therefore he has to apprehend that his suggestions will be odious, not only as innovations, but above all as foreign, as Athenian: deep-seated, old animosities and suspicions will be aroused by his recommendations. He begins his explicit criticism with a remark about the probable connection between certain Cretan and Spartan institutions and the practice of homosexuality in these cities. The Spartan, rising in defense of his fatherland, does not, indeed, defend homosexuality, but, turning to the offensive, rebukes the Athenians for their excessive drinking. The Athenian is thus given a perfect excuse for recommending the introduction of the Athenian institution of banquets: he is com-



pelled to defend that institution; by defending it he acts the part, not of a civilizing philosopher who, being a philosopher, is a philanthropist, but of the patriot. He acts in a way which is perfectly understandable to his interlocutors and perfectly respectable in their opinion. He attempts to show that wine-drinking, and even drunkenness, if it is practiced in well-presided banquets, is conducive to education in temperance or moderation. This speech about wine forms the bulk of the first two books of the *Laws*. Only after the speech about wine has been brought to its conclusion does the Athenian turn to the question of the beginning of political life, to a question which is the true beginning of his political theme. The speech about wine appears to be *the* introduction to political philosophy.

Why does *the* Platonic dialogue about politics and laws begin with such an extensive conversation about wine? What is the artistic or logographic necessity demanding this? The proper interlocutors in a conversation about laws are old citizens of communities famous for their laws, for their obedience and allegiance to their old laws. Such men understand best what living under laws, living in laws, means. They are the perfect incarnation of the spirit of laws: of lawfulness, of law-abidingness. But their very virtue becomes a defect if there is no longer a question of preserving old laws, but of seeking the best laws or introducing new and better ones. Their habits and their competence make these men impervious to suggestions for improvement. The Athenian induces them to participate in a conversation about wine-drinking, about a pleasure that is forbidden to them by their old laws. The talk about wine-drinking is a kind of vicarious enjoyment of wine, especially since wine-drinking is a forbidden pleasure. Perhaps the talk reminds the two old interlocutors of secret and pleasurable transgressions of their own. The effect of the talk about wine is therefore similar to the effect of actual wine-drinking; it loosens their tongues; it makes them young; it makes them bold, daring, willing to innovate. They must not actually drink wine, since this would impair their judgment. They must drink wine, not in deed, but in speech.

But this means that wine-drinking educates to boldness, to courage, and not to moderation, and yet wine-drinking was said to be conducive to moderation. Let us therefore consider the other



partner in the conversation, the Athenian philosopher. To doubt the sacredness of the ancestral means to appeal from the ancestral to the natural. It means to transcend all human traditions, nay, the whole dimension of the merely human. It means to learn to look down on the human as something inferior or to leave the cave. But by leaving the cave one loses sight of the city, of the whole political sphere. If the philosopher is to give political guidance, he must return to the cave: from the light of the sun to the world of shadows; his perception must be dimmed; his mind must undergo an obfuscation. The vicarious enjoyment of wine through a conversation about wine, which enlarges the horizon of the law-bred old citizens, limits the horizon of the philosopher. But this obfuscation, this acceptance of the political perspective, this adoption of the language of political man, this achievement of harmony between the excellence of man and the excellence of the citizen, or between wisdom and law-abidingness is, it seems, the most noble exercise of the virtue of moderation: wine-drinking educates to moderation. For moderation is not a virtue of thought: Plato likens philosophy to madness, the very opposite of sobriety or moderation; thought must be not moderate, but fearless, not to say shameless. But moderation is a virtue controlling the philosopher's speech.

We have suggested that the Athenian stranger had gone to Crete in order to civilize an uncivilized society, and that he had done this out of philanthropy. But does not philanthropy begin at home? Did he not have more pressing duties to perform at home? What kind of man is the Athenian stranger? The *Laws* begins with the word "God": it is the only Platonic dialogue which begins in that manner. There is one and only one Platonic dialogue which ends with the word "God": the *Apology of Socrates*. In the *Apology of Socrates* an old Athenian philosopher, Socrates, defends himself against the charge of impiety, of not believing that the gods worshiped by the city of Athens exist. It seems that there is a conflict between philosophy and accepting the gods of the city. In the *Laws* an old Athenian philosopher recommends a law about impiety which renders impossible the conflict between philosophy and the city, or which brings about harmony between philosophy and the city. The gods whose existence is to be admitted by every citizen of the city of the *Laws* are beings whose existence can be



demonstrated. That old Athenian philosopher of the *Apology of Socrates* was condemned to death by the city of Athens. He was given an opportunity to escape from prison: he refused to avail himself of this opportunity. His refusal was not based on an appeal to a categorical imperative demanding passive obedience, without if's and but's. His refusal was based on a deliberation, on a prudential consideration of what was the right thing to do in the circumstances. One of the circumstances was Socrates' old age: we are forced to wonder how Socrates would have decided if he had been 30 or 40 years old instead of 70. Another circumstance was the unavailability of a proper place of exile: where should he flee? He seems to have a choice between law-abiding cities nearby, where his life would be unbearable, since he would be known as a fugitive from justice, and a lawless country far away, where the prevailing lack of order would make his life miserable. The disjunction is obviously incomplete: there were law-abiding cities far away, for instance on Crete, which is mentioned as a law-abiding place in the very deliberation in question. We are entitled to infer that if Socrates had fled, he would have gone to Crete. The *Laws* tells us what he would have done in Crete after his arrival: he would have brought the blessings of Athens, Athenian laws, Athenian institutions, banquets, and philosophy to Crete. (When Aristotle speaks about Plato's *Laws*, he takes it for granted that the chief character of the *Laws* is Socrates.) Escaping to Crete, living in Crete, was the alternative to dying in Athens. But Socrates chose to die in Athens. Socrates preferred to sacrifice his life in order to preserve philosophy in Athens rather than to preserve his life in order to introduce philosophy into Crete. If the danger to the future of philosophy in Athens had been less great, he might have chosen to flee to Crete. His choice was a political choice of the highest order. It did not consist in the simple subsumption of his case under a simple, universal, and unalterable rule.

But let us return after this long story to the beginning of Plato's *Laws*. If the originator of the Cretan laws, or any other laws, is not a god, the cause of laws must be human beings, the human legislator. There is a variety of types of human legislators: the legislator has a different character in a democracy, in an oligarchy, in a monarchy. The legislator is the governing body, and the character of the governing body depends on the whole social and



political order, the *politeia*, the regime. The cause of the laws is the regime. Therefore the guiding theme of political philosophy is the regime rather than the laws. Regime becomes the guiding theme of political thought when the derivative or questionable character of laws has been realized. There are a number of Biblical terms which can be properly translated by "law"; there is no Biblical equivalent to "regime."

Regime is the order, the form, which gives society its character. Regime is therefore a specific manner of life. Regime is the form of life as living together, the manner of living of society and in society, since this manner depends decisively on the predominance of human beings of a certain type, on the manifest domination of society by human beings of a certain type. Regime means that whole, which we today are in the habit of viewing primarily in a fragmentized form: regime means simultaneously the form of life of a society, its style of life, its moral taste, form of society, form of state, form of government, spirit of laws. We may try to articulate the simple and unitary thought, that expresses itself in the term *politeia*, as follows: life is activity which is directed towards some goal; social life is an activity which is directed towards such a goal as can be pursued only by society; but in order to pursue a specific goal, as its comprehensive goal, society must be organized, ordered, constructed, constituted in a manner which is in accordance with that goal; this, however, means that the authoritative human beings must be akin to that goal.

There is a variety of regimes. Each regime raises a claim, explicitly or implicitly, which extends beyond the boundaries of any given society. These claims conflict, therefore, with each other. There is a variety of conflicting regimes. Thus the regimes themselves, and not any preoccupation of mere bystanders, force us to wonder which of the given conflicting regimes is better, and ultimately, which regime is the best regime. Classical political philosophy is guided by the question of the best regime.

The actualization of the best regime depends on the coming together, on the coincidence of, things which have a natural tendency to move away from each other (e.g., on the coincidence of philosophy and political power); its actualization depends therefore on chance. Human nature is enslaved in so many ways that it is almost a miracle if an individual achieves the highest: what can one



expect of society! The peculiar manner of being of the best regime—namely, its lacking actuality “while being superior to all actual regimes—has its ultimate reason in the dual nature of man, in the fact that man is the in-between being: in between brutes and gods.

The practical meaning of the notion of the best regime appears most clearly, when one considers the ambiguity of the term “good citizen.” Aristotle suggests two entirely different definitions of the good citizen. In his more popular *Constitution of Athens* he suggests that the good citizen is a man who serves his country well, without any regard to the difference of regimes—who serves his country well in fundamental indifference to the change of regimes. The good citizen, in a word, is the patriotic citizen, the man whose loyalty belongs first and last to his fatherland. In his less popular *Politics*, Aristotle says that there is not *the* good citizen without qualification. For what it means to be a good citizen depends entirely on the regime. A good citizen in Hitler’s Germany would be a bad citizen elsewhere. But whereas good citizen is relative to the regime, good man does not have such a relativity. The meaning of good man is always and everywhere the same. The good man is identical with the good citizen only in one case—in the case of the best regime. For only in the best regime is the good of the regime and the good of the good man identical, that goal being virtue. This amounts to saying that in his *Politics* Aristotle questions the proposition that patriotism is enough. From the point of view of the patriot, the fatherland is more important than any difference of regimes. From the point of view of the patriot, he who prefers any regime to the fatherland is a partisan, if not a traitor. Aristotle says in effect that the partisan sees deeper than the patriot but that only one kind of partisan is superior to the patriot; this is the partisan of virtue. One can express Aristotle’s thought as follows: patriotism is not enough for the same reason that the most doting mother is happier if her child is good than if he is bad. A mother loves her child because he is her own; she loves what is her own. But she also loves the good. All human love is subject to the law that it be both love of one’s own and love of the good, and there is necessarily a tension between one’s own and the good, a tension which may well lead to a break, be it only the breaking of a heart. The relation between one’s own and the good finds its political expression in the relation between the father-



land and the regime. In the language of classical metaphysics, the fatherland or the nation is the matter whereas the regime is the form. The classics held the view that the form is higher in dignity than the matter. One may call this view "idealism." The practical meaning of this idealism is that the good is of higher dignity than one's own, or that the best regime is a higher consideration than the fatherland. The Jewish equivalent of this relation might be said to be the relation between the Torah and Israel.

Classical political philosophy is today exposed to two very common objections, the raising of which requires neither originality nor intelligence, nor even erudition. The objections are these: (1) classical political philosophy is anti-democratic and hence bad; (2) classical political philosophy is based on classical natural philosophy or on classical cosmology, and this basis has been proven to be untrue by the success of modern natural science.

To speak first of the classics' attitude towards democracy, the premises: "the classics are good," and "democracy is good" do not validate the conclusion "hence the classics were good democrats." It would be silly to deny that the classics rejected democracy as an inferior kind of regime. They were not blind to its advantages. The severest indictment of democracy that ever was written occurs in the eighth book of Plato's *Republic*. But even there, and precisely there, Plato makes it clear—by coordinating his arrangement of regimes with Hesiod's arrangement of the ages of the world—that democracy is, in a very important respect, equal to the best regime, which corresponds to Hesiod's golden age: since the principle of democracy is freedom, all human types can develop freely in a democracy, and hence in particular the best human type. It is true that Socrates was killed by a democracy; but he was killed when he was 70; he was permitted to live for 70 long years. Yet Plato did not regard this consideration as decisive. For he was concerned not only with the possibility of philosophy, but likewise with a stable political order that would be congenial to moderate political courses; and such an order, he thought, depends on the predominance of old families. More generally, the classics rejected democracy because they thought that the aim of human life, and hence of social life, is not freedom but virtue. Freedom as a goal is ambiguous, because it is freedom for evil as well as for good. Virtue emerges normally only through education, that is to say, through



the formation of character, through habituation, and this requires leisure on the part of both parents and children. But leisure in its turn requires some degree of wealth—more specifically a kind of wealth whose acquisition or administration is compatible with leisure. Now, as regards wealth, it so happens, as Aristotle observes, that there is always a minority of well-to-do people and a majority of the poor, and this strange coincidence will last forever because there is a kind of natural scarcity. “For the poor shall never cease out of the land.” It is for this reason that democracy, or rule of the majority, is government by the uneducated. And no one in his senses would wish to live under such a government. This classical argument would not be stringent if men did not need education in order to acquire a firm adhesion to virtue. It is no accident that it was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who taught that all knowledge which men need in order to live virtuously is supplied by the conscience, the preserve of the simple souls rather than of other men: man is sufficiently equipped by nature for the good life; man is by nature good. But the same Rousseau was compelled to develop a scheme of education which very few people could financially afford. On the whole the view has prevailed that democracy must become rule by the educated, and this goal will be achieved by universal education. But universal education presupposes that the economy of scarcity has given way to an economy of plenty. And the economy of plenty presupposes the emancipation of technology from moral and political control. The essential difference between our view and the classical view consists then, not in a difference regarding moral principle, not in a different understanding of justice: we, too, even our communist coexistents, think that it is just to give equal things to equal people and unequal things to people of unequal merit. The difference between the classics and us with regard to democracy consists exclusively in a different estimate of the virtues of technology. But we are not entitled to say that the classical view has been refuted. Their implicit prophecy that the emancipation of technology, of the arts, from moral and political control would lead to disaster or to the dehumanization of man has not yet been refuted.

Nor can we say that democracy has found a solution to the problem of education. In the first place, what is today called education, very frequently does not mean education proper, i.e., the



formation of character, but rather instruction and training. Secondly, to the extent to which the formation of character is indeed intended, there exists a very dangerous tendency to identify the good man with the good sport, the cooperative fellow, the "regular guy," i.e., an overemphasis on a certain part of social virtue and a corresponding neglect of those virtues which mature, if they do not flourish, in privacy, not to say in solitude: by educating people to cooperate with each other in a friendly spirit, one does not yet educate non-conformists, people who are prepared to stand alone, to fight alone, "rugged individualists." Democracy has not yet found a defense against the creeping conformism and the ever-increasing invasion of privacy which it fosters. Beings who look down on us from a star might find that the difference between democracy and communism is not quite as great as it appears to be when one considers exclusively the doubtless very important question of civil and political liberties, although only people of exceptional levity or irresponsibility say that the difference between communism and democracy is negligible in the last analysis. Now to the extent to which democracy is aware of these dangers, to the same extent it sees itself compelled to think of elevating its level and its possibilities by a return to the classics' notions of education: a kind of education which can never be thought of as mass-education, but only as higher and highest education of those who are by nature fit for it. It would be an understatement to call it royal education.

Yet granted that there are no valid moral or political objections to classical political philosophy—is that political philosophy not bound up with an antiquated cosmology? Does not the very question of the nature of man point to the question of the nature of the whole, and therewith to one or the other specific cosmology? Whatever the significance of modern natural science may be, it cannot affect our understanding of what is human in man. To understand man in the light of the whole means for modern natural science to understand man in the light of the sub-human. But in that light man as man is wholly unintelligible. Classical political philosophy viewed man in a different light. It was originated by Socrates. And Socrates was so far from being committed to a specific cosmology that his knowledge was knowledge of ignorance. Knowledge of ignorance is not ignorance. It is knowledge of the elusive character of the truth, of the whole. Socrates, then,



viewed man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole. He held therefore that we are more familiar with the situation of man as man than with the ultimate causes of that situation. We may also say he viewed man in the light of the unchangeable ideas, i.e., of the fundamental and permanent problems. For to articulate the situation of man means to articulate man's openness to the whole. This understanding of the situation of man which includes, then, the quest for cosmology rather than a solution to the cosmological problem, was the foundation of classical political philosophy.

To articulate the problem of cosmology means to answer the question of what philosophy is or what a philosopher is. Plato refrained from entrusting the thematic discussion of this question to Socrates. He entrusted it to a stranger from Elea. But even that stranger from Elea did not discuss explicitly what a philosopher is. He discussed explicitly two kinds of men which are easily mistaken for the philosopher, the sophist and the statesman: by understanding both sophistry (in its highest as well as in its lower meaning) and statesmanship, one will understand what philosophy is. Philosophy strives for knowledge of the whole. The whole is the totality of the parts. The whole eludes us but we know parts: we possess partial knowledge of parts. The knowledge which we possess is characterized by a fundamental dualism which has never been overcome. At one pole we find knowledge of homogeneity: above all in arithmetic, but also in the other branches of mathematics, and derivatively in all productive arts or crafts. At the opposite pole we find knowledge of heterogeneity, and in particular of heterogeneous ends; the highest form of this kind of knowledge is the art of the statesman and of the educator. The latter kind of knowledge is superior to the former for this reason. As knowledge of the ends of human life, it is knowledge of what makes human life complete or whole; it is therefore knowledge of a whole. Knowledge of the ends of man implies knowledge of the human soul; and the human soul is the only part of the whole which is open to the whole and therefore more akin to the whole than anything else is. But this knowledge—the political art in the highest sense—is not knowledge of *the* whole. It seems that knowledge of the whole would have to combine somehow political knowledge in the highest sense with knowledge of homogeneity. And this combination is not at our disposal. Men are therefore constantly



tempted to force the issue by imposing unity on the phenomena, by absolutizing either knowledge of homogeneity or knowledge of ends. Men are constantly attracted and deluded by two opposite charms: the charm of competence which is engendered by mathematics and everything akin to mathematics, and the charm of humble awe, which is engendered by meditation on the human soul and its experiences. Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm. It is the highest form of the mating of courage and moderation. In spite of its highness or nobility, it could appear as Sisyphean or ugly, when one contrasts its achievement with its goal. Yet it is necessarily accompanied, sustained and elevated by *eros*. It is graced by nature's grace.

### III. The Modern Solutions

It was possible to speak of the classical solution to the problem of political philosophy because there is a fundamental and at the same time specific agreement among all classical political philosophers: the goal of political life is virtue, and the order most conducive to virtue is the aristocratic republic, or else the mixed regime. But in modern times, we find a great variety of fundamentally different political philosophies. Nevertheless, all modern political philosophies belong together because they have a fundamental principle in common. This principle can best be stated negatively: rejection of the classical scheme as unrealistic. The positive principle animating modern political philosophy has undergone a great variety of fundamental changes. This fact, and its reason, can be shown best if we proceed in a somewhat more narrative way than we have done hitherto.

The founder of modern political philosophy is Machiavelli. He tried to effect, and he did effect, a break with the whole tradition of political philosophy. He compared his achievement to that of men like Columbus. He claimed to have discovered a new moral continent. His claim is well founded; his political teaching is "wholly new." The only question is whether the new continent is fit for human habitation.

In his *Florentine Histories* he tells the following story: Cosimo de Medici once said that men cannot maintain power with pater-



nosters in their hands. This gave occasion to Cosimo's enemies to slander him as a man who loved himself more than his fatherland and who loved this world more than the next. Cosimo was then said to be somewhat immoral and somewhat irreligious. Machiavelli himself is open to the same charge. His work is based on a critique of religion and a critique of morality.

His critique of religion, chiefly of Biblical religion, but also of paganism, is not original. It amounts to a restatement of the teaching of pagan philosophers, as well as of that medieval school which goes by the name of Averroism and which gave rise to the notion of the three impostors. Machiavelli's originality in this field is limited to the fact that he was a great master of blasphemy. The charm and gracefulness of his blasphemies will however be less strongly felt by us than their shocking character. Let us then keep them under the veil under which he has hidden them. I hasten to his critique of morality which is identical with his critique of classical political philosophy. One can state the main point as follows: there is something fundamentally wrong with an approach to politics which culminates in a utopia, in the description of a best regime whose actualization is highly improbable. Let us then cease to take our bearings by virtue, the highest objective which a society might choose; let us begin to take our bearings by the objectives which are actually pursued by all societies. Machiavelli consciously lowers the standards of social action. His lowering of the standards is meant to lead to a higher probability of actualization of that scheme which is constructed in accordance with the lowered standards. Thus, the dependence on chance is reduced: chance will be conquered.

The traditional approach was based on the assumption that morality is something substantial: that it is a force in the soul of man, however ineffective it may be especially in the affairs of states and kingdoms. Against this assumption Machiavelli argues as follows: virtue can be practiced only within society; man must be habituated to virtue by laws, customs and so forth. Men must be educated to virtue by human beings. But to quote that Machiavellian, Karl Marx, the educators themselves must be educated. The original educators, the founders of society, cannot have been educated to virtue: the founder of Rome was a fratricide. Morality is possible only within a context which cannot be created by



morality, for morality cannot create itself. The context within which morality is possible is created by immorality. Morality rests on immorality, justice rests on injustice, just as all legitimacy ultimately rests on revolutionary foundations. Man is not by nature directed toward virtue. If he were, pangs of conscience would be the greatest evil for him; but in fact we find that the pangs of disappointment are at least as strong as the pangs of guilt. In other words, one cannot define the good of society, the common good, in terms of virtue, but one must define virtue in terms of the common good. It is this understanding of virtue which in fact determines the life of societies. By the common good we must understand the objectives actually pursued by all societies. These objectives are: freedom from foreign domination, stability or rule of law, prosperity, glory or empire. Virtue in the effectual sense of the word is the sum of habits which are required for or conducive to this end. It is this end, and this end alone, which makes our actions virtuous. Everything done effectively for the sake of this end is good. This end justifies every means. Virtue is nothing but civic virtue, patriotism or devotion to collective selfishness.

Machiavelli cannot leave it at this. Devotion to the fatherland is itself dependent on education. This means that patriotism is not natural. Just as man is not by nature directed toward virtue, he is not by nature directed toward society. By nature man is radically selfish. Yet while men are by nature selfish, and nothing but selfish, hence bad, they can become social, public spirited, or good. This transformation requires compulsion. The success of this compulsion is due to the fact that man is amazingly malleable: much more so than had hitherto been thought. For if man is not by nature ordered toward virtue or perfection, if there is no natural end of man, man can set for himself almost any end he desires: man is almost infinitely malleable. The power of man is much greater, and the power of nature and chance is correspondingly much smaller, than the ancients thought.

Men are bad; they must be compelled to be good. But this compulsion must be the work of badness, of selfishness, of selfish passion. Which passion will induce a bad man to be passionately concerned with compelling other bad men to become good and to remain good? Which passion will educate the educator of men? The passion in question is the desire for glory. The highest form



of the desire for glory is the desire to be a new prince in the fullest sense of the term, a wholly new prince: a discoverer of a new type of social order, a molder of many generations of men. The founder of society has a selfish interest in the preservation of society, of his work. He has therefore a selfish interest in the members of his society being and remaining sociable, and hence good. The desire for glory is the link between badness and goodness. It makes possible the transformation of badness into goodness. The wholly new prince of the highest kind is animated by nothing but selfish ambition. The great public tasks which he undertakes are for him only opportunities for coloring his design. He is distinguished from great criminals merely by the fact that the criminals lack a defensible opportunity; the moral motivation is the same.

It is not possible here to show how Machiavelli succeeds in building on this basis a political teaching which does full justice to all possible requirements of any policy of blood and iron, and which is at the same time most favorable to political liberty and the rule of law. I must limit myself to indicating how easy it is, after a few centuries of Machiavellianization of Western thought, to give Machiavelli's teaching an air of perfect respectability. He can be presented as arguing as follows: you want justice? I am going to show you how you can get it. You will not get it by preaching, by hortatory speeches. You will get it only by making injustice utterly unprofitable. What you need is not so much formation of character and moral appeal, as the right kind of institutions, institutions with teeth in them. The shift from formation of character to the trust in institutions is the characteristic corollary of the belief in the almost infinite malleability of man.

In Machiavelli's teaching we have the first example of a spectacle which has renewed itself in almost every generation since. A fearless thinker seems to have opened up a depth from which the classics, in their noble simplicity, recoiled. As a matter of fact, there is in the whole work of Machiavelli not a single true observation regarding the nature of man and of human affairs with which the classics were not thoroughly familiar. An amazing contraction of the horizon presents itself as an amazing enlargement of the horizon. How can we account for this delusion? By Machiavelli's time the classical tradition had undergone profound changes. The contemplative life had found its home in monasteries. Moral virtue



had been transfigured into Christian charity. Through this, man's responsibility to his fellow men and for his fellow men, his fellow creatures, had been infinitely increased. Concern with the salvation of men's immortal souls seemed to permit, nay, to require courses of action which would have appeared to the classics, and which did appear to Machiavelli, to be inhuman and cruel: Machiavelli speaks of the pious cruelty of Ferdinand of Aragon, and by implication of the inquisition, in expelling the Marannos from Spain. Machiavelli was the only non-Jew of his age who expressed this view. He seems to have diagnosed the great evils of religious persecution as a necessary consequence of the Christian principle, and ultimately of the Biblical principle. He tended to believe that a considerable increase in man's inhumanity was the unintended but not surprising consequence of man's aiming too high. Let us lower our goals so that we shall not be forced to commit any bestialities which are not evidently required for the preservation of society and of freedom. Let us replace charity by calculation, by a kind of utilitarianism *avant la lettre*. Let us revise all traditional goals from this point of view. I would then suggest that the narrowing of the horizon which Machiavelli was the first to effect, was caused, or at least facilitated, by anti-theological ire—a passion which we can understand but of which we cannot approve.

Machiavelli radically changed, not only the substance of the political teaching, but its mode as well. The substance of his political teaching may be said to be the wholly new teaching regarding the wholly new prince, i.e., regarding the essential inherence of immorality in the foundation of society and hence in the structure of society. The discoverer of such a teaching is necessarily a bringer of a new moral code, of a new Decalogue. He is a wholly new prince in the highest possible sense of the term, a new Moses, a prophet. Concerning prophets, Machiavelli teaches that all armed prophets have conquered and all unarmed prophets have failed. The greatest example of an armed prophet is Moses. The greatest example of an unarmed prophet is Jesus. But can Machiavelli reasonably say that Jesus has failed? Or to put the same question in a different form, is not Machiavelli himself an unarmed prophet? How can he possibly hope for the success of his more than daring venture if unarmed founders necessarily fail?

Jesus failed insofar as he was crucified. He did not fail insofar



as the new modes and orders found by him have become accepted by many generations of many nations. This victory of Christianity was due to propaganda: the unarmed prophet conquered posthumously by virtue of propaganda. Machiavelli, being himself an unarmed prophet, has no other hope of conquest except through propaganda. The only element of Christianity which Machiavelli took over was the idea of propaganda. This idea is the only link between his thought and Christianity. He attempted to destroy Christianity by the same means by which Christianity was originally established. He desired to imitate, not Moses, the armed prophet, but Jesus. It goes without saying that Machiavelli's *imitatio Christi* is limited to this point. In particular, the author of *Mandragola* avoided the cross in more than one sense by not publishing his great works during his lifetime.

Machiavelli assumed that every religion or "sect" has a lifespan of between 1,666 and 3,000 years. He was then uncertain as to whether the end of Christianity would come about a century after his death or whether Christianity might still last for another millenium and a half. Machiavelli thought and wrote in this perspective: that he himself might be preparing a radical change of modes and orders, a change which would be consummated in a not too distant future, but that it is equally possible that his enterprise would fail completely. He certainly reckoned with the possibility that the destruction of the Christian Church was imminent. As for the way in which Christianity might be superseded by a new social order, he saw this alternative. One possibility was the irruption of barbarian hordes from the East, from what is now Russia: it was this region which he regarded as the pool from which the human race rejuvenates itself periodically. The alternative was a radical change within the civilized world. It was of course only the latter kind of change for which he was anxious, and which he did everything in his power to prepare. He conceived of this preparation as of a war, a spiritual war. He desired to bring about a change of opinion which in due time would precipitate a change in political power. He did not expect more than the conversion of very few men, but he counted on influencing many. These many were those who, in case of conflict between their fatherland and their souls, the salvation of their souls, would prefer their fatherland; these many were the lukewarm Christians. He expected these many to be sympathetic



to his enterprise, which was infinitely more favorable to the earthly fatherland than to the heavenly fatherland of the Christians. These many would not be able to understand the full meaning of his undertaking, but they could be counted upon to guarantee that his books would get some hearing. They would make his books publicly defensible. However, they would not be reliable allies in his war to the finish. His long range success depended on the full conversion of some men, of very few. They would provide the vital center which would gradually inspire, in favorable circumstances, the formation of a new ruling class, a new kind of princes, comparable to the patriciate of ancient Rome. Machiavelli's warfare has the character of propaganda. No earlier philosopher had thought of guaranteeing the posthumous success of his teaching by developing a specific strategy and tactics for this purpose. The earlier philosophers of all persuasions were resigned to the fact that their teaching, the true teaching, would never supersede what they regarded as false teachings, but would coexist with them. They offered their teachings to their contemporaries and above all to posterity, without even dreaming of controlling the future fate of human thought in general. And if they were political philosophers, and had arrived at definite conclusions regarding the right political order, they would have been vicious, and hence not philosophers, if they had not been willing to help their fellow men in ordering their common affairs in the best possible way. But they did not for one moment believe that the true political teaching is, or is likely to be, the political teaching of the future. Machiavelli is the first philosopher who attempted to force chance, to control the future by embarking on a campaign, a campaign of propaganda. This propaganda is at the opposite pole of what is now called propaganda, high-pressure salesmanship and hold-up of captive audiences. Machiavelli desires to convince, not merely to persuade or to bully. He was the first of a long series of modern thinkers who hoped to bring about the establishment of new modes and orders by means of enlightenment. The enlightenment—*lucus a non lucendo*—begins with Machiavelli.

In order to realize the magnitude of Machiavelli's success it is necessary that one should have a clear grasp of his principle. This principle, to repeat, is this: one must lower the standards in order to make probable, if not certain, the actualization of the right or



desirable social order or in order to conquer chance; one must effect a shift of emphasis from moral character to institutions. The right order, as Machiavelli himself conceived of it, was the hard-headed republic, which was modelled on ancient Rome, but which was meant to be an improvement on ancient Rome. For what the Romans had done haphazardly or instinctively can now be done consciously and deliberately: now—after Machiavelli has understood the reasons of the success of the Romans. Republicanism in the Roman style, as interpreted by Machiavelli, became one of the most powerful trends of modern political thought. We observe its presence in the works of Harrington, Spinoza, Algernon Sydney, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and in *The Federalist*, and among those upper class Frenchmen who favored the French revolution out of concern for the status of France as a great power. But this posthumous success of Machiavelli is not comparable in importance to that which came about through the transformation of his scheme—a transformation which was inspired by his own principle.

Machiavelli's scheme was open to serious theoretical difficulties. The theoretical or cosmological basis of his political teaching was a kind of decayed Aristotelianism. This means that he assumed, but did not demonstrate, the untenable character of teleological natural science. He rejected the view that man must take his bearings by virtue, by his perfection, by his natural end; but this rejection required a criticism of the notion of natural ends. This proof was supplied, or was thought to be supplied, by the new natural science of the 17th century. There is a hidden kinship between Machiavelli's political science and the new natural science. The classics had taken their bearings by the normal case as distinguished from the exception; Machiavelli effects his radical change in the understanding of political things by taking his bearings by the exception, by the extreme case. As appears from Bacon, there is a close connection between Machiavelli's orientation and the notion of torturing nature, i.e., of the controlled experiment.

But the main reason why Machiavelli's scheme had to be modified was its revolting character. The man who mitigated Machiavelli's scheme in a manner which was almost sufficient to guarantee the success of Machiavelli's primary intention was Hobbes. One could think for a moment that Hobbes's correction of Machiavelli consists in a masterpiece of prestidigitation. Machiavelli wrote a



book called *On The Prince*; Hobbes wrote a book called *On The Citizen*; i.e., Hobbes chose as his theme, not the practices of kingdoms and states, but rather the duties of subjects; hence what Hobbes did teach sounds much more innocent than what Machiavelli had taught, without necessarily contradicting Machiavelli's teaching. But it is both more charitable and more correct to say that Hobbes was an honest and plain-spoken Englishman who lacked the fine Italian hand of his master. Or if you wish, you may compare Hobbes to Sherlock Holmes and Machiavelli to Professor Moriarty. For certainly Hobbes took justice much more seriously than Machiavelli had done. He may even be said to have defended the cause of justice: he denies that it is of the essence of civil society to be founded on crime. To refute Machiavelli's fundamental contention may be said to be the chief purpose of Hobbes's famous doctrine about the state of nature. He accepted the traditional notion that justice is not merely the work of society but that there is a natural right. But he also accepted Machiavelli's critique of traditional political philosophy: traditional political philosophy aimed too high. Hence he demanded that natural right be derived from the beginnings: the elementary wants or urges, which effectively determine all men most of the time and not from man's perfection or end, the desire for which effectively determines only a few men, and by no means most of the time. These primary urges are of course selfish; they can be reduced to one principle: the desire for self-preservation, or negatively expressed, the fear of violent death. This means that not the glitter and glamour of glory—or pride—but the terror of fear of death stands at the cradle of civil society: not heroes, if fratricidal and incestuous heroes, but naked, shivering poor devils were the founders of civilization. The appearance of the diabolical vanishes completely. But let us not be too rash. Once government has been established, the fear of violent death turns into fear of government. And the desire for self-preservation expands into the desire for comfortable self-preservation. Machiavelli's glory is indeed deflated; it stands now revealed as mere, unsubstantial, petty, ridiculous vanity. That glory does not however give way to justice or human excellence, but to concern with solid comfort, with practical, pedestrian hedonism. Glory survives only in the form of competition. In other words, whereas the pivot of Machiavelli's political teaching was



glory, the pivot of Hobbes's political teaching is power. Power is infinitely more businesslike than glory. Far from being the goal of a lofty or demonic longing, it is required by, or the expression of, a cold objective necessity. Power is morally neutral. Or, what is the same thing, it is ambiguous if of concealed ambiguity. Power, and the concern with power lack the direct human appeal of glory and the concern with glory. It emerges through an estrangement from man's primary motivation. It has an air of senility. It becomes visible in grey eminences rather than in Scipios and Hannibals. Respectable, pedestrian hedonism, sobriety without sublimity and subtlety, protected or made possible by "power politics"—this is the meaning of Hobbes's correction of Machiavelli.

Hobbes's teaching was still much too bold to be acceptable. It, too, was in need of mitigation. The mitigation was the work of Locke. Locke took over the fundamental scheme of Hobbes and changed it only in one point. He realized that what man primarily needs for his self-preservation is less a gun than food, or more generally, property. Thus the desire for self-preservation turns into the desire for property, for acquisition, and the right to self-preservation becomes the right to unlimited acquisition. The practical consequences of this small change are enormous. Locke's political teaching is the prosaic version of what in Hobbes still had a certain poetic quality. It is, precisely on Hobbes's premises, more reasonable than Hobbes's own political teaching. With a view to the resounding success of Locke, as contrasted with the apparent failure of Hobbes, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, we can say that Machiavelli's discovery or invention of the need for an immoral or amoral substitute for morality, became victorious through Locke's discovery or invention that that substitute is acquisitiveness. Here we have an utterly selfish passion whose satisfaction does not require the spilling of any blood and whose effect is the improvement of the lot of all. In other words, the solution of the political problem by economic means is the most elegant solution, once one accepts Machiavelli's premise: economism is Machiavellianism come of age. No one understood this more profoundly than Montesquieu. His *Esprit des Lois* reads as if it were nothing but the document of an incessant fight, an unresolved conflict, between two social or political ideals: the Roman republic, whose principle is virtue, and England, whose principle is political liberty. But in fact Montesquieu



decides eventually in favor of England. The superiority of England is based in his view on the fact that the English had found a substitute for stern, republican, Roman virtue; that substitute is trade and finance. The ancient republics based on virtue, needed pure manners; the modern system which replaces virtue by trade, is productive of gentle manners, of *humanité*. In Montesquieu's work we observe a last resurgence of the poetry underlying modern prose. There are only two books of the *Esprit des Lois* which are prefaced with poems: the book dealing with population is prefaced with Lucretius' verses in praise of Venus; the first book dealing with commerce is prefaced with a prose poem which is the work of Montesquieu himself.

This serpentine wisdom, which corrupted by charming and charmed by corrupting, this degradation of man, called forth Jean Jacques Rousseau's passionate and still unforgettable protest. With Rousseau there begins what we may call the second wave of modernity: the wave which bore both German idealistic philosophy and the romanticism of all ranks in all countries. This great and complex counter-movement consisted in the first place in a return from the world of modernity to pre-modern ways of thinking. Rousseau returned from the world of finance, from what he was the first to call the world of the *bourgeois*, to the world of virtue and the city, to the world of the *citoyen*. Kant returned from Descartes' and Locke's notion of ideas to the Platonic notion. Hegel returned from the philosophy of reflection to the "higher vitality" of Plato and Aristotle. And romanticism as a whole is primarily a movement of return to the origins. Yet in all these cases, the return to pre-modern thought was only the initial step of a movement which led, consciously or unconsciously, to a much more radical form of modernity—to a form of modernity which was still more alien to classical thought than the thought of the 17th and 18th centuries had been.

Rousseau returned from the modern state as it had developed by his time to the classical city. But he interpreted the classical city in the light of Hobbes's scheme. For according to Rousseau too, the root of civil society is the right of self-preservation. But deviating from Hobbes and from Locke, he declares that this fundamental right points to a social order which is closely akin to the classical



city. The reason for this deviation from Hobbes and Locke is identical with the primary motivation of modern political philosophy in general. In Hobbes's and Locke's schemes, the fundamental right of man had retained its original status even within civil society: natural law remained the standard for positive law; there remained the possibility of appealing from positive law to natural law. This appeal was of course, generally speaking, ineffective; it certainly did not carry with itself the guarantee of its being effective. Rousseau drew from this the conclusion that civil society must be so constructed as to make the appeal from positive law to natural law utterly superfluous; a civil society properly constructed in accordance with natural law will automatically produce just positive law. Rousseau expresses this thought as follows: the general will, the will of a society, in which everyone subject to the law must have had a say in the making of the law, cannot err. The general will, the will immanent in societies of a certain kind, replaces the transcendent natural right. One cannot emphasize too strongly that Rousseau would have abhorred the totalitarianism of our day. He favored, indeed, the totalitarianism of a free society, but he rejected in the clearest possible language any possible totalitarianism of government. The difficulty into which Rousseau leads us lies deeper. If the ultimate criterion of justice becomes the general will, i.e., the will of a free society, cannibalism is as just as its opposite. Every institution hallowed by a folk-mind has to be regarded as sacred.

Rousseau's thought marks a decisive step in the secular movement which tries to guarantee the actualization of the ideal, or to prove the necessary coincidence of the rational and the real, or to get rid of that which essentially transcends every possible human reality. The assumption of such a transcendence had permitted earlier men to make a tenable distinction between liberty and license. License consists in doing what one lists; liberty consists in doing in the right manner the good only; and our knowledge of the good must come from a higher principle, from above. These men acknowledged a limitation of license which comes from above, a vertical limitation. On the basis of Rousseau, the limitation of license is effected horizontally by the license of other men. I am just if I grant to every other man the same rights which I claim for myself, regardless of what these rights may be. The horizontal limitation is preferred to



the vertical limitation because it seems to be more realistic: the horizontal limitation, the limitation of my claim by the claims of others is self enforcing.

One might say that Rousseau's doctrine of the general will is a juridical, not a moral doctrine, and that the law is necessarily more lax than morality. One might illustrate this distinction by referring to Kant who declared in his moral teaching that every lie, the saying of any untruth, is immoral, whereas he declared in his juridical teaching that the right of freedom of speech is as much the right to lie as the right to say the truth. But one may very well wonder whether the separation of law and morality of which German legal philosophy was so proud, is in itself a sound suggestion. Above all, the moral teaching of Rousseau does not dispose of the difficulty indicated. The place occupied in his juridical teaching by the right of self preservation is occupied in his moral teaching by the right or duty of self legislation. "Material" ethics gives way to "formal" ethics with the result that it becomes impossible ever to establish clear substantive principles and that one is compelled to borrow substantive principles from the "general will" or from what came to be called History.

Rousseau was not unaware of these difficulties. They had been caused by the exinanition of the notion of human nature and ultimately by the turn from man's end to man's beginning. Rousseau had accepted Hobbes's anti-teleological principle. By following it more consistently than Hobbes himself had done, he was compelled to reject Hobbes's scheme or to demand that the state of nature—man's primitive and pre-social condition—be understood as perfect, i.e., as not pointing beyond itself toward society. He was compelled to demand that the state of nature, man's beginning, become the goal for social man: only because man has drifted away from his beginnings, because he has thus become corrupted, does he need an end. That end is primarily the just society. The just society is distinguished from the unjust society by the fact that it comes as close to the state of nature as a society possibly can: the desire determining man in the state of nature, the desire for self-preservation, is the root of the just society and determines its end. This fundamental desire which is at the same time the fundamental right, animates the juridical as distinguished from the moral: society is so far from being based on morality that it is the basis of morality;



the end of society must therefore be defined in juridical, not in moral terms; and there cannot be an obligation to enter society (or the social contract cannot bind "the body of the people"). Whatever the meaning and the status of morality may be, it certainly presupposes society, and society, even the just society, is bondage or alienation from nature. Man ought therefore to transcend the whole social and moral dimension and to return to the wholeness and sincerity of the state of nature. Since the concern with self-preservation compels man to enter society, man ought to go back beyond self-preservation to the root of self-preservation. This root, the absolute beginning, is the feeling of existence, the feeling of the sweetness of mere existence. By giving himself to the sole feeling of his present existence without any thought of the future, by thus living in blessed oblivion of every care and fear, the individual senses the sweetness of all existence: he has returned to nature. It is the feeling of one's existence which gives rise to the desire for the preservation of one's existence. This desire compels man to devote himself entirely to action and thought, to a life of care and duty and misery, and therewith cuts him off from the bliss which is buried in his depth or origin. Only very few men are capable of finding the way back to nature. The tension between the desire for the preservation of existence and the feeling of existence expresses itself therefore in the insoluble antagonism between the large majority who in the best case will be good citizens and the minority of solitary dreamers who are the salt of the earth. Rousseau left it at that antagonism. The German philosophers who took up his problem thought that a reconciliation is possible, and that reconciliation can be brought about, or has already been brought about, by History.

German idealistic philosophy claimed to have restored, and more than restored, the high level of classical political philosophy while fighting against the debasement caused by the first wave of modernity. But to say nothing of the replacement of Virtue by Freedom, the political philosophy belonging to the second wave of modernity is inseparable from philosophy of history, and there is no philosophy of history in classical political philosophy. For what is the meaning of the philosophy of history? Philosophy of history shows the essential necessity of the actualization of the right order. There is no chance in the decisive respect, i.e., the same realistic



tendency which led to the lowering of the standards in the first wave led to philosophy of history in the second wave. Nor was the introduction of philosophy of history a genuine remedy for the lowering of the standards. The actualization of the right order is achieved by blind selfish passion: the right order is the unintended by-product of human activities which are in no way directed toward the right order. The right order may have been as loftily conceived by Hegel as it was by Plato, which one may doubt. It certainly was thought by Hegel to be established in the Machiavellian way, not in the Platonic way: it was thought to be established in a manner which contradicts the right order itself. The delusions of communism are already the delusions of Hegel and even of Kant.

The difficulties to which German idealism was exposed gave rise to the third wave of modernity—of the wave that bears us today. This last epoch was inaugurated by Nietzsche. Nietzsche retained what appeared to him to be the insight due to the historical consciousness of the 19th century. But he rejected the view that the historical process is rational as well as the premise that a harmony between the genuine individual and the modern state is possible. He may be said to have returned, on the level of the historical consciousness, from Hegel's reconciliation to Rousseau's antinomy. He taught then that all human life and human thought ultimately rests on horizon-forming creations which are not susceptible of rational legitimization. The creators are great individuals. The solitary creator who gives a new law unto himself and who subjects himself to all its rigors takes the place of Rousseau's solitary dreamer. For Nature has ceased to appear as lawful and merciful. The fundamental experience of existence is therefore the experience, not of bliss, but of suffering, of emptiness, of an abyss. Nietzsche's creative call to creativity was addressed to individuals who should revolutionize their own lives, not to society or to his nation. But he expected or hoped that his call, at once stern and imploring, questioning and desirous to be questioned, would tempt the best men of the generations after him to become true selves and thus to form a new nobility which would be able to rule the planet. He opposed the possibility of a planetary aristocracy to the alleged necessity of a universal classless and stateless society. Being certain of the tameness of modern western man, he preached the



sacred right of “merciless extinction” of large masses of men with as little restraint as his great antagonist had done. He used much of his unsurpassable and inexhaustible power of passionate and fascinating speech for making his readers loathe, not only socialism and communism, but conservatism, nationalism and democracy as well. After having taken upon himself this great political responsibility, he could not show his readers a way toward political responsibility. He left them no choice except that between irresponsible indifference to politics and irresponsible political options. He thus prepared a regime which, as long as it lasted, made discredited democracy look again like the golden age. He tried to articulate his understanding both of the modern situation and of human life as such by his doctrine of the will to power. The difficulty inherent in the philosophy of the will to power led after Nietzsche to the explicit renunciation of the very notion of eternity. Modern thought reaches its culmination, its highest self-consciousness, in the most radical historicism, i.e., in explicitly condemning to oblivion the notion of eternity. For oblivion of eternity, or, in other words, estrangement from man’s deepest desire and therewith from the primary issues, is the price which modern man had to pay, from the very beginning, for attempting to be absolutely sovereign, to become the master and owner of nature, to conquer chance.